Organisational Know-How and Work Readiness:

Making the Implicit Explicit— Insights From the CET Roundtable

In partnership with Speakers for Schools, 2040 Leaders and The Brokerage - June 2025

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Executive Summary

Organisational know-how is about understanding how organisations work and interact and how they can become successful. It offers insights into typical structures, roles, and work cultures, as well as the different types and sizes of organisations, industries, and sectors, and how they interact. It helps people see how education and training may equip them for individual pathways through and between sectors. Building this understanding should start early in the classroom and become more targeted through part-time jobs or work experience. Yet these skills are rarely taught directly, leaving many young people, especially from underserved backgrounds, to learn through trial and error.

CET convened a roundtable with partners and professionals to discuss the "invisible curriculum" and share insights on organisational know-how, work readiness, inclusion, and career progression.

This report distills key insights from the roundtable discussions: highlighting the importance of practical experience, the role of managers as culture-setters, and strategies for making implicit workplace knowledge explicit for all. By shedding light on best practices and common pitfalls, the following pages aim to equip educators, employers, and young professionals with clear pathways to foster greater workplace belonging and capability.

Understanding the Gap

Young people entering the workplace often face an invisible curriculum—unwritten rules, expectations, and behaviours that aren't openly communicated. Those without workplace role models can find it challenging to navigate these unspoken realities, sometimes leading to misunderstandings or setbacks early in their careers.

Support systems and proactive communication can make all the difference. Creating an open environment where expectations are made clear ensures that new employees feel seen, heard, and able to ask for guidance as they adapt to professional norms.

"It felt like being dropped off a cliff into the most important game of your life and no one told you the rules." - Intern

Common Barriers Encountered

Lack of access to informal feedback

Limited networking or role model opportunities

Unclear behavioural expectations

Cultural or social codes not made explicit

The Importance of Work Experience and Building Structured Pathways

"The best way to learn is being in the room, absorbing how people behave, speak, respond. You can't replicate that through Zoom." - Employer

High-quality work experience serves as a vital springboard for young people, equipping them with key insights into how professional environments operate. However, many students from less advantaged backgrounds face barriers to meaningful placements, which can limit their confidence and readiness.

To address these gaps, the roundtable endorsed a structured three-stage framework by Speakers for Schools, for effective work experience:

- **ENVISION**: Clarify goals, establish supportive and inclusive practices, and connect with organisations.
- **IMPLEMENT**: Deliver engaging, structured, and interactive tasks.
- **REFLECT**: Give students space to cement their learning, express what they have gained, and build on their achievements.

By embedding these principles, employers and educators can transform work experience into a launchpad for ongoing progression rather than a one-off event.

The Manager Relationship: Key to Early Career Success

Managers play a pivotal role in shaping how young employees adapt and thrive in the workplace. Beyond overseeing tasks, effective managers act as mentors, advocates, and translators of workplace culture. When young professionals are guided with trust and clarity, rather than micromanagement, they are more likely to develop confidence, motivation, and essential soft skills.

Supporting early-career talent means empowering managers with training, encouraging open communication, and fostering an environment where learning from mistakes is valued as part of growth.

Prioritise coaching and progress over perfectionism

Invest in manager development to foster supportive leadership

Offer transparent expectations and actionable feedback to every team member

Model That Works: Impact of Manager-Apprentice Training

A recent report by 2040 Leaders on collaborative training between managers and young professionals has shown significant positive outcomes. Participants developed stronger communication skills, clearer mutual expectations, and enhanced trust, making transitions into work smoother and more effective.

Equipping teams with relational and feedback tools empowers both managers and early-career hires to work together efficiently, supporting growth and retention across the organisation.

"Knowing what's expected and how highly regarded something is from your manager's perspective and vice versa is what's going to help us grow alongside them." — Apprentice

Key Outcomes Achieved
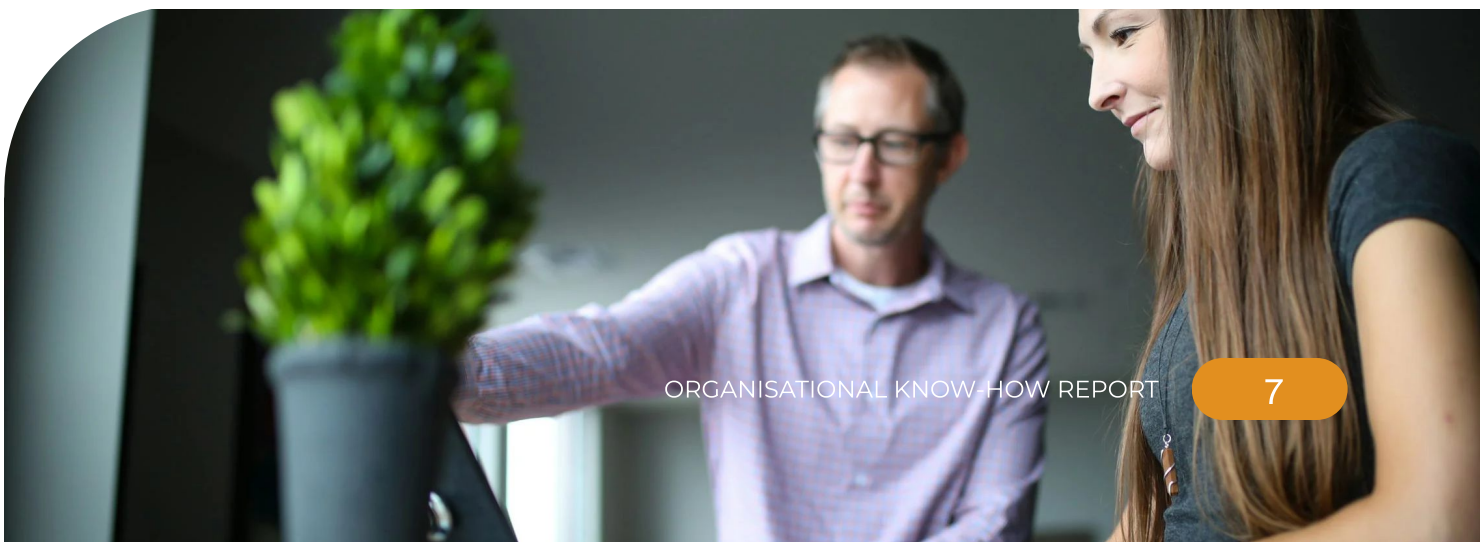
✔ Increased workplace confidence

✔ Notable improvements in professional relationships

✔ Better prepared and supportive managers

✔ Faster adaptation to organisational culture

Embedding Organisational Know-How: Culture, Systems, and Skills

"Investing In Work Readiness Isn't Charity...It's Talent Pipeline Management." - Employer

Building a culture of organisational know-how requires deliberate action—from onboarding and buddy schemes to peer-learning opportunities and skills-based training. Buddy systems make it easier for new joiners to seek guidance, project-based learning mirrors real-world teamwork, and mentoring supports skill growth across career stages. Emphasising transferable skills helps everyone communicate and collaborate effectively, bridging gaps between roles and backgrounds.

By designing supportive systems and a shared language for skill development, organisations create environments where every employee has the confidence and clarity needed to succeed.

Building the Case for Organisational Know-How

Organisations that invest in workplace readiness and organisational know-how see direct benefits such as improved retention, increased productivity, and a stronger, more diverse talent pipeline. However, for many employers, these advantages remain undervalued until clear business results are demonstrated. In parallel, schools must introduce workplace skills and awareness earlier, since perceptions of what is possible form long before most students access formal work experience. With more roles starting remotely, organisations must also bridge the gap in informal learning and relationship-building for early-career professionals.

To address these challenges, leaders should:
- Recognise that perfection is not always necessary—adaptability and learning are equally key
- Identify and support capable team managers as bridges for new talent
- Give teams clear guidance so newcomers can navigate with confidence and minimal intervention

Organisational Know-How Report

Conclusion & Next Steps

Empowering young professionals with organisational know-how is essential to building inclusive, high-performing workplaces. Effective strategies include: establishing post-experience pathways, providing managers with focused training, implementing buddy systems for new starters, standardising work experience criteria, and using evidence to make the business case for investment. By putting these actions at the centre of organisational strategy, businesses and educators can ensure that success is measured not just by entry, but by growth and progression for all.